

Linguistic Landscape as an arena of conflict: Language removal, exclusion, and ethnic identity construction in Lithuania (Vilnius)

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1 Introduction

Imagine a world without public signs: no street names, airports and train stations without information boards, public buildings without signs directing us to different floors and services, “naked” roads and motorways, supermarkets without marked aisles and price tags. Public signage is one of the most useful features of modern life, which most of us take for granted.

We live in an increasingly globalised multilingual world, which builds complicated spaces. To navigate through world cities, we rely on public signs. That is why “wayfinding”, a term coined by the American urban planner Lynch (1960), has become a special professional field of wayfinding designers. It has grown exponentially since the 1960s, as businesses realised that well organised wayfinding systems can have financial benefits. The field has been expanded to include marketing and advertising, which are omnipresent in commercial signs. “Written language is an important part of these multimodal messages” (Gorter, 2012: 1) and it is not surprising that the development of wayfinding also attracted the attention of linguists interested in understanding how languages and images in public spaces can be interpreted as “maps of meaning” (Jackson, 1989) which represent our society and reflect the complex socio-cultural and political forces that create it. Their investigations extended beyond commercial public signage and included non-commercial, official and non-official signs. These are known as Linguistic Landscape studies, a rapidly developing multidisciplinary field, which is proving of interest to researchers from a variety of different backgrounds, including linguistics, sociology, anthropology, urban studies, politics, semiotics, education, and economics. The common interest of all is the understanding that LL is the scene where public space is symbolically constructed (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Hasan Amara, Trumper-Hecht, 2006; Shohamy, Gorter, 2009). The construction is created by the markings of objects – material and immaterial – with linguistic tokens. These tokens may be

analysed according to the languages used, their importance and prominence in the LL, as well as their syntactic and semantic aspects.

The term “Linguistic Landscape” (LL) can be traced to an article published in 1997: “The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 25). But the interest in languages in public spaces has a longer history. The first sociolinguistic studies, which investigated public signage appeared in the 1970s (Masai, 1972; Tulp, 1978). Masai’s study focused on language choices in what were perceived as monolingual areas of Tokyo. It discovered the presence of English in addition to Japanese. Tulp’s research in the officially bilingual Brussels uncovered the predominance of French. In the 1980s and 1990s, these projects were followed by a number of idiosyncratic studies of the role of global English in multilingual settings and on language maintenance and vitality in bilingual settings.

By 2005 the body of work in this area was sufficient for Gorter to say that across the world the interest in the study of LL is growing (2005). Shohamy noted that 2006, the year of publication of the special issue of the *Journal of Multilingualism*, edited by Gorter, became the date of the establishment of regular LL research with a focus on multilingualism (2016). This issue was later published as a book (Gorter, 2006), which became one of the first publications to set a more solid foundation for LL research. An annual international LL Workshop was organised in Tel Aviv in 2008, and since then nine have taken place around the world. The tenth was in 2018 in Bern, Switzerland. These workshops resulted in the publication of collections of LL studies, which expanded the methodological and theoretical frameworks of the field and revealed its multifaceted applications (Hélot&Barni, 2013; Jaworski&Thurlow, 2010; Shohamy, Rafael, Barni, 2010; Shohamy& Gorter, 2009).

More thematically specific collections have appeared in recent years (Blackwood, Lanza, & Woldemariam, 2016; Blackwood et al., 2016; Laitinen & Zabrodska, 2015). These yielded innovative findings about identity, language policy, language conflicts, language justice and rights. The topic of conflict in particular has been the focus of researchers for a number of years (Papen, 2012;

Philipps, 2012; E. G. Shohamy, 2006), culminating in the publication of a volume “Conflict, exclusion and dissent in the linguistic landscape” (Rubdy & Said, 2015). A new research journal, *Linguistic Landscape*, has been published since 2015 by John Benjamin’s Publishing Company.

Many earlier studies of LL were based on an exploration of the texts displayed in public space and employed mostly quantitative analysis of data. Some researchers focused on a particular type of sign, such as billboards, shop signs and names, road signs or brand names. Some included all these texts, others counted as part of their studies texts on non-static objects, such as transport and clothes and even language used on the internet. More recent research puts an emphasis on “expanding the scenery” (Shohamy, Gorter, 2009) of LL beyond the initial writings, introducing wider and more diverse views. It asserts that LL is a broader concept than the simple documentation of linguistic tokens. It incorporates multimodal theories that include monuments, sounds, images and graffiti. A new term has been suggested by Jaworski and Thurlow – Semiotic Landscape (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). The motivation behind this is that in our modern multimedia world social space is used as a semiotic resource in which language and space interact very closely. It claims that LL is not a neutral phenomenon, but needs to be contextualised in a contested sphere of the “free” space that belongs to “all”. It studies public space in contexts of identity and language policy of nations, political and social conflicts. This approach requires qualitative and interpretive analysis of data or a mixed-methods approach that “combines a quantitative survey of the linguistic landscape with a qualitative component” (Rubdy & Said, 2015: 8).

In their seminal article, Landry and Bourhis highlighted two basic functions of LL: informational and symbolic. The former provides an insight into the distribution of languages in a particular area and the power relations between the different language groups in that area, while the latter is connected to the identity of the area’s language users and inhabitants, particularly “in settings where language has emerged as the most important dimension of ethnic identity” (Landry & Bourhis 1997, 25-29). Current research has opened up new areas of exploration that analyse how LL can help to uncover explicit and implicit forms of language exclusion and suppression which lead to ethnic conflicts. Also, signs could be studied as a form of

political activism “indexing contestation and dissent in situations of social and ideological conflict” (Rubdy & Said, 2015: 3).

Due to the continuing development of LL and its multidisciplinary nature, researchers in this area employ a variety of methodologies. For example, the contributors to the volume “Conflict, exclusion and dissent in the linguistic landscape” (Rubdy & Said, 2015) analyse the LL in their studies using various methods. Their mostly qualitative interpretive frameworks utilise a range of analytical instruments from sociolinguistics, anthropology, cultural geography, language policy, semiotics, and urban studies, to name just a few.

Gorter (2006) noted that theoretical framework in which the analyses are done differs among the various studies. He concludes: “The approach still has to be developed further” (Gorter 2006: 3).

In post-Soviet studies LL has emerged both as a space where language conflicts are particularly visible, and as a tool for the analysis of the changing linguistic situation (Pavlenko, 2009). My aim is to illustrate that socio-linguistic changes in Vilnius, which has been chosen as a case study, are much broader than simply a change in languages used in public signage. The context of de-Sovetisation in the Baltic States calls for an interpretation of the LL concept which takes into account the cultural and physical landscape (Czepczyński, M., 2008; Herrschel, T., 2007), including monuments and everyday items. Therefore, I will adopt elements of different theoretical frameworks for my analysis. Theoretical focus on power relations in social sciences (Bourdieu, 1991) and in “monumental politics” from cultural geography (Forest, B., Johnson, J., Till, K., 2004; Czepczyński, M., 2008; Forest & Johnson, 2011), anthropological concept of liminality (Van Gennep, A., 1960), the subjectivist perspective (Goffman, 1963) and a methodological approach that “treats space as a discursive as well as physical formation” (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010: 12) are combined to examine the process of linguistic tokens erasion and replacement, and monument destruction, creation, and alteration in post-Soviet Vilnius. Analysis of these processes reveals a narrative that illuminates the otherwise hidden long established historical conflicts related to the linguistic rights of minorities and identity issues today.

I will also be using a multimodal diachronic LL analysis in combination with synchronic analysis. Until recently, most Western LL investigations have been dominated by the synchronic approach to the analysis of public space, treating public signage and extra-linguistic signs as static (here and now). However, some researchers argue that in order to understand texts, signs and spatial discourse we need what Blommaert calls “deep ethnographic immersion”. He writes: “On the one hand, to grasp the situated and momentary occurrence of a sign in this shop window, on this street, at this time; on the other hand, a need to situate these observations within much longer historical trajectory to account for the complexity of forces and meanings that dynamically come to bear on the instance of a sign and its interpretation”. (Blommaert, 2013: 11). Pavlenko also sees LL studies as dynamic phenomena which should be examined in a diachronic manner (Pavlenko, A., 2009).

Following Blommaert and Pavlenko, I believe that this approach is particularly useful in the analysis of post-Soviet space. As the LL of ex-Soviet republics experienced massive transformations over the last 25 years, the interpretation of LL data there should be connected with the history of their cities and neighbourhoods.

This chapter will expose historical and modern ethnic tensions in Lithuanian society. We will analyse how written languages interact with the physical features of the cityscape to construct new landscapes and express ethnic conflicts, exclusion and inequality resulting from the socio-political and ideological power changes. This approach emphasizes the importance of LL in a socio-historical context and leads to a greater understanding of the identity and language rights issues of national minorities not reflected in the current legislative system. It illustrates that language is key to managing and resolving such conflicts.

The discussion is backed by a corpus of more than 450 photographs collected with kind permission from the Polish National Digital Archive, Lithuanian State Archive, newspapers, private photo and post card collections, and by the author’s photographs taken during field trips to Vilnius (2015 – 2017).

2 Vilnius - The present and the past

On arrival in Lithuania, the airport greets visitors with the name of its capital, Vilnius. Exiting the *Oro Uostas* (airport), we can catch a bus to *Stotis* (railway station) (Fig. 1)

and walk from there to explore the main street of the old city. The Lithuanian language is everywhere, and we don't even stop to think that this could be any different. However, Vilnius is a city inhabited by people of 128 ethnicities (Population and Housing Census of the Republic of Lithuania, 2011: 151).



Figure 1 (a) Lithuanian capital's name on the airport façade; (b) A Lithuanian sign on a bus from the airport, 2017 (author's photographs).

Modern Vilnius is the “focal point of modern politics” and what we see today “is the result of homogenising and nationalising efforts of the state” (Weeks, 2015: 1) to nationalise urban space and represent the nation since the declaration of independence in 1989. Strong attachment to the national language and the metaphor of its displacement in Soviet times became key elements in the self-identification and the strict policy of titular monolingualism. To understand why and how the Lithuanian language assumed such a strong symbolic function in post-Soviet times, we will now turn to diachronic analysis of the sociolinguistic landscape of Vilnius.

The city's importance to a variety of cultures and ethnicities is unparalleled. Through centuries “it occupied a central place in the national identity of Lithuanians,

Poles, Jews, and Russians” (Weeks 2015: 1). As we can see from the next sections, the very name of the city has changed several times over the centuries, reflecting cultural, demographic, and political power shifts, accompanied by linguistic tensions and conflicts.

2.1 The Russian Empire (1864 -1917)

The diachronic Linguistic Landscape analysis of public spaces in Vilnius combined with the synchronic-descriptive approach yields a very complex socio-political narrative related to the historical processes of Polonisation, Russification, and Lithuaniasation of the city. It uncovers the roots of long standing ethnic tensions between Lithuanians, Poles, and Russians, which are still evident today. We chose the period from 1864 as the starting point of our discussion, as there is very little visual evidence available from earlier periods.¹ Our collection of more than 450 photographs from different historical periods shows a variety of public signs and monuments, which make the linguistic landscape of Vilnius resemble a palimpsest: signs being continually changed and overwritten in different languages (for a more detailed discussion see Moore, 2018).

We will attempt to decipher this seeming disorder, however chaotic it appears to be, using the structuralist methodological principles developed in social science and cultural geography. The first is attached to the name of Bourdieu (1991), who put forward the suggestion that social reality consists mainly of power relations between categories of participants in given social fields (urban spaces in our study). From this perspective, the relationships between different codes in LL could be explained in terms of power relations. The second is connected with monumental politics, the study of monuments, memory and public spaces, which asserts that elites create nations by constructing shared national identities via processes of monument creation, destruction and alteration (Forest & Johnson, 2011).

Our “photographic walk” through the streets of Vilna (as it was known under the Russian rule) between 1864 and 1905, would have left us in no doubt that we

¹ Although historical monographs, socio-linguistic studies, and memoirs of the city’s inhabitants allow us to take a trip back in history and see the complex picture of identity changes and language conflicts, which resulted from numerous political and social dislocations. A detailed discussion of earlier periods can be found in the fascinating monograph “Vilnius between Nations, 1795 - 2000” (Weeks, 2015).

were in one of the cities of the Russian Empire. Street names were in Russian and even shops were required to have Russian signs or inscriptions at least as large as those in other languages (Weeks, 2004).

The majority of signs in our corpus are commercial. Russian dominates, as the example below illustrates (Fig. 2 (a)).



Figure 2 (a) Circled in red is a commercial Russian sign *Кофейня* (Coffee House), 1910; (b) The statue of Catherine II, 1904

(http://www.archyvai.lt/lt/vaa_virtualios-parodos/vilniui-690-metu.html)

The intensive Russification of public spaces in Vilnius during this period is considered to be a harsh response by the Tsarist government to the insurrections (1831 and 1863) against Russian rule. From a “Bourdieuian” perspective, power relations reflect the extent to which social actors are able to impose their symbols, actions, and behavioural patterns on others, even against their will (Bourdieu, 1983; 1991). In relation to LL, this structuralist principle “may transpire in the stronger social actors’ capacity to impose limitations on weaker actors’ use of linguistic resources” (Shohamy et al., 2010: 17). Vilnius university, the centre of Polish culture, was closed in 1831. Schools with Lithuanian language of instruction were also closed (Stražas, 1996). Officially, the public speaking of Polish and Lithuanian

was forbidden. The Lithuanian Press Ban was imposed from 1864-1904. It forbade the publication or import from abroad of Lithuanian language publications in the Latin alphabet. Only Lithuanian books using Cyrillic script were permitted. There was also a strict censorship of Polish publications.² Although, before then Vilnius had been under Russian Imperial rule for 69 years, the consistent Russification did not begin until the post-insurrection period.

The linguistic landscape of that period could be analysed as a socio-cultural “artefact” of its time. Simultaneously, it was also a tool for “analytic arrangement of space” (Certeau, 1985) to produce a landscape of Russian power. The “Russianness” of the city was also accentuated by monuments, such as that of the Russian Empress Catherine II (Fig. 2 (b)) and various imperial Russian statesmen. During times of crisis, political actors employ monuments as vehicles to legitimate their claims on power and their visions of society. These symbols, in turn, declare publicly which groups and histories the official sphere recognises as central to the state’s identity (Forest & Johnson, 2011).

However, this hegemonisation through spatialisation produced only “a very thin and fragile Russian veneer” (Weeks, 2004: 4).³ The Lithuanian Press Ban and the policy of linguistic and cultural Russification also had an effect on the comparatively small and politically passive Lithuanian population. During this time a number of illegal Lithuanian-language periodicals emerged urging resistance to Russian assimilation. Although most ethnic Lithuanians lived in the countryside, and their language was rarely heard in the city, the national movement gained momentum after the Press Ban. It became known as the “book carriers’ time” (*knygnešiai* in Lithuanian). Book carriers smuggled Lithuanian language books in the Latin script printed in Lithuania Minor (a historical ethnographic region of Prussia, later East prussia in Germany). This helped to identify language as central to the national Lithuanian identity (Clarke, 2006) and is still vital in understanding socio-linguistic tensions in modern Lithuania.

² For example, post-1863, no Polish periodicals were allowed in Vilnius, and one of the largest Polish publishing houses, the Zawadzki firm, “essentially stopped publishing in Polish for forty years” (Weeks, 2015: 73).

³ A number of documents from the Russian State Historical archives, report that Poles dominated the organs of urban self-government in Vilna, continued to speak Polish, to teach it illegally to their children, and brought in Polish publications from other cities (Weeks, 2004).

After the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, as a concession to the local population and in an attempt to gain their support, the Press Ban was officially lifted and the censorship of Polish publications relaxed. The first non-Russian newspaper published in Vilnius was a Lithuanian language daily *Vilniaus Žinios* (Vilnius News), which was soon followed by Polish and Yiddish periodicals (Lapinskienė, 2001).

These events and the 1905 Russian Revolution allowed rapid development of a Lithuanian national movement, which put forward demands for ethnic-national rights and led to a major event in the history of Lithuania, The Great Parliament of Vilnius (*Didysis Vilniaus Seimas*). This pressed for an autonomous Lithuanian national state with Lithuanian as the only official language and changed the name of the city from Vilna to Vilnius in all its documentation. The next decade saw a growing number of Lithuanian language periodicals, primary schools and courses for adults to teach basic literacy, exhibitions of Lithuanian art, and publications of Lithuanian poems and songs (Zinkevičius, 1994). The growing visibility of Lithuanian culture was also reflected in the city's urban space. The language made an appearance on some public signs, mostly in combination with Russian or Polish. Figure 3 shows a private Lithuanian school with a Russian-Lithuanian sign, Russian text on left and the Lithuanian on the right. The position of languages on signs is one of the aspects commonly analysed in modern synchronic studies of linguistic landscapes, and can be also very useful in diachronic analysis.



Figure 3 A Russian-Lithuanian sign on a private school, 1912
(http://www2.lrs.lt/kt_inst/pamink)

The visual hierarchy, i.e. the presentation and placement of texts in respective languages, allows researchers to analyse their socio-political positioning. Scollon and Scollon (2003) argue that “privileged” languages usually appear ‘earlier’ in the sign (at the top, on the left or in the centre), whereas “lesser” languages tend to appear at the bottom, or on the right. If we look through this analytical lens, Lithuanian appears in the “underprivileged” position (on the right).

Another interesting aspect of sign analysis is their distributional patterns: do they appear on the periphery, in the centre, near the entry points of the city, etc. In central locations, signs tend to follow official regulations and often reflect power and cultural dominance, whilst away from the main streets, signage tends to reflect new informal developments in socio-political and cultural stratification. The sign (Fig. 3) is located on a small side street in the old part of the city. The signs on photographs from that period depicting the main streets of Vilnius and the main entry point to the capital (railway station) contain either Russian or Russian and Polish (Fig.4). The absence of Lithuanian in central locations may indicate that “in politics much of the

old remained” (Weeks, 2015: 93) despite the growing visibility of Lithuanian culture and the assertiveness of the national movement. Russian was still the *de jure* language in this corner of the Russian Empire, and Polish - the *de facto* language of urban self-government and high culture.



Figure 4 (a) A Russian name of the city *Вильна* (circled in red) is visible on the Vilnius station platform, 1913 (<http://wilenskie.fotopolska.eu/foto/590/590059.jpg>); (b) A Russian-Polish billboard advertising Aslanov wine and brandy on the main square of the city (circled in red), 1915 (http://www.archyvai.lt/lt/vaa_virtualios-parodos/vilniui-690-metu.html)

However, 1905 was a crucial year, which saw the expansion of the city’s socio-political and cultural sphere in different languages. The Lithuanian claims to the city were seen as a potential threat to Russian and Polish culture.⁴

The start of World War I meant that the Lithuanian threat to Polish Vilno (as it was known in Polish) was not immediate. In September 1915, as German troops entered the city and forced the Russians to leave, the German commander proclaimed that the Russian army has been expelled from the Polish city Wilno,

⁴ There even were fistfights and conflicts over the language of hymns and prayers in mixed Polish-Lithuanian parishes. The Lithuanian position that “Vilnius was and must be their capital city augured ill for the future” (Weeks, 2015: 94), as we will discuss in later sections.

which was “always the pearl in the glorious Kingdom of Poland” (Pfeil, G. in Weeks, 2015: 100). Other ethnic groups were not mentioned in this proclamation, but they saw the Germans as liberators and anticipated better treatment than under the Tsarist regime (Burhardt, 1934; Puksztó, 2002). At first, their hopes seemed to be supported by a swift de-Russification of the city and the seemingly liberal German cultural policy.

The three years of power change from Russian to German were accompanied by a great landscape sweep which is a part of van Gennep’s anthropological progressive model of liminality. According to it, all societies follow a three-fold structure of rites of passage during times of major socio-political transformations (Van Gennep, 1960). It includes a pre-liminal (separation) phase, liminal (transition) phase and the final post-liminal phase (reincorporation). The first (separation phase) is based on defining the new power and new coding during the transformation period, with cultural cleansing also a part of this phase. Landscape sweep usually occurs directly after the process of separation and consists of the removal of unwanted codes and symbols, renaming, rededication and re-use of the old symbolic heritage. In terms of LL, the new power actors introduce new language policies which are reflected on urban spaces, such as street names and monuments. For example, one of the first decrees issued by the new German power stated that the language of instruction in schools should be the mother tongue of the pupils (Polish or Lithuanian), but not Russian. The defeated Russian army took with it many symbols of its dominance, including the monument of Catherine II. Many street signs were torn down or defaced, shop signs painted over or had their Russian components removed (Weeks, 2004). Overall, the face of the city reflected the constantly changing socio-political conditions and illustrated how they were negotiated and contested.

The second is a liminal phase (transition) characterised by a *mélange* of meanings and representations. The old landscape is re-interpreted and de-contextualised, while the new landscape is constructed, both physically and mentally. On the surface this often results in a chaotic LL, which is “no longer typical of the previous regime, but at

the same time quite different from the aspired one” (Czepczyński, 2016: 72). For example, this could be seen in photographs taken in Vilnius in 1915. Although they depict the addition of German to the public signage, it often co-existed with some

surviving Russian signs, or was used in bilingual German-Lithianian and German-Polish signs (Fig. 5).



Figure 5 (a) A German sign on a hostel for German Soldiers, 1915 (*Deutsches Soldatenheim*) circled in green hangs next to commercial Russian signs circled in red (www.etoretro.ru); (b) A German-Polish shop sign, 1916 (www.etoretro.ru); (c) A Lithuanian-German sign above a soup kitchen, 1917 (<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread>)

However, our analysis of distributional patterns of official signs in prominent positions (street names, railway station signs, etc.) reveals that the only language used was German, thus, signalling the ruling power. As one of the contemporary observers wrote: “The city has entered the newest phase in its cultural development, which has swept away the earlier periods of Lithianian, then Polish, and finally Russian influence” (Friedrichsen, M. in Weeks 2015: 107).

2.2 Polish Vilno (1918 - 1939)

In this section we will look at the third and final phase (reincorporation) of Van Genepp's liminal rites of passage and how it is expressed in the LL of the city, which continued to be a contested territory. By October 1920, Vilnius was under Polish control again. It was incorporated into Poland in 1922 and remained so until 1939. The Lithuanian government moved temporarily to Kaunas, which was not considered the true capital. The Vilnius Question grew into a national obsession to retake the city (Davoliūtė, 2013: 27).

Polish authorities embarked on a process of re-establishing a Polish Vilno, starting yet another pre-liminal phase in its historical development. Being constantly "dislocated" during the interwar period, it became an urban palimpsest reflecting the conflicts and aspirations of different power groups. Landscape sweep was initiated once again, illustrating that language removal and replacement in cityscapes are examples of re-appropriation of public spaces connected with the processes of power change and national self-determination. Three photographs in our data of the same Military Hospital during different "power periods" illustrate the city's "dislocation" and appropriation by Russian, German, and Polish powers and show the importance of LL in such conflicts (Fig. 6).

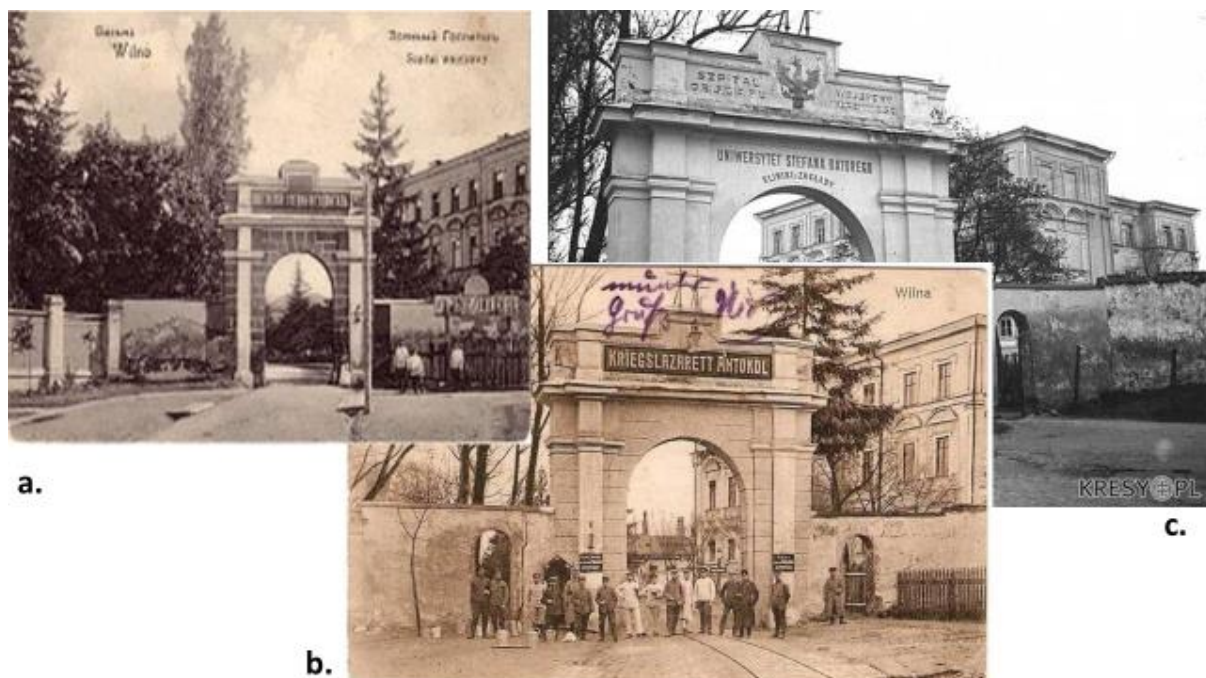


Figure 6 (a) A Russian sign, 1829 (<http://www.gidas.mb.vu.lt/page/6/>); (b) A German sign, 1917 (<http://www.madeinvilnius.com/lt/kultura/ekskursijose-auksto-europinio-meninio-lygio-sapiegu-rumu-freskos/i/>); (c) A Polish sign, 1939

(<http://www.przewodnik-wilno.lt/novosci/14-sample-data-articles/142-uniwersytet-wilenski-po-wlaczeniu-wilna-do-litwy-w-1939-roku>)

The building was used as a hospital for military personnel by each changing power and was an important representation of its hegemony in the city. It reflected the language of the political elite even during comparatively short periods of domination, when less important commercial signs, such as seen above in figure 5, represented mixed and unstable codes. Spatial representation of power structures produces a picture of the dislocated world as coherent and stable (Czepczyński, 2008), something that creates and consolidates national memory. As discussed in section 2.1., space equals power and produces “ideological closure” (Laclau, 1990).

The analysis of the Vilnius cityscape during these years indicates that Polish “re-branding” was as important a tool in the consolidation and stabilisation of Polish rule as the closure of Lithuanian schools and the re-opening of a Polish university. Many streets were renamed. If Germans simply translated the Russian name of the main street, the Polish authorities re-named it after their national poet Mickiewicz, thus emphasising not only their political presence, but also interpreting the capital city as symbol of their national historical continuity.

By the 1930s the Polish identity of the city was unmistakable. The surface chaos in its LL which followed frequent power changes after the fall of the Russian Empire was temporarily resolved despite the Lithuanian claims for the city from Kaunas. According to Van Gennep’s concept of rites of passage, this could be considered as a final post-liminal (incorporation phase), when the division between ‘old’ and ‘new’ power becomes insignificant and eventually disappears, “the ‘old’ merging and becoming assimilated into contemporary social, cultural and economic life” (Van Gennep, 1960: 198).

Our corpus from this period shows various commercial outlets along Mickiewicz Street, and Polish radio had its first broadcast. The city’s public transport was another example of Polish social landscape. The first autobuses were purchased in 1926 and by 1930 ran along three routes (Weeks 2015). All signs indicating bus routes and information at bus stops were in Polish (Fig. 7 (a)). Polish became the dominant language of the socio-linguistic landscape of Vilnius (known

then as Vilno). All signs along the main Mickiewicz Street were now in Polish (Fig.7 (b)).



Figure 7 (a) A bus with a Polish route sign, 1937; (b) A Polish shop sign *Tanie Pończochy* (Cheap Stockings) on Mickiewicz Street (circled in red), 1938
(<https://audiovis.nac.gov.pl/obraz/85021/>)

However, the Vilnius Question remained the focus of the Lithuanian-Polish conflict. “Literally dozens of pamphlets and books arguing each side’s case appeared in the 1920s and 1930s. The Poles stressed the present-day ethnic makeup of the city, while Lithuanians relied on historical and legal arguments” (Weeks, 2004: 22). The anti-Polish propaganda and pro-Vilnius campaigns continued across the border, from Kaunas.

If the socio-linguistic landscape of Vilnius was an example of Polish hegemonisation of urban space, political posters and commemorative medals became the anti-Polish propaganda weapon of choice. Figure 8 below is an example of political activism that signals dissent and contestation in situations of socio-ideological and cultural conflicts (Rubdy & Said, 2015). It shows the first of several anti-Polish medals struck in 1920 in protest against the Polish occupation of Vilnius.



Figure 8 An anti-Polish Commemorative medal designed by the Lithuanian sculptor P. Rimša, 1920

(http://www.albionmich.com/history/histor_notebook/imagesS/Rimša4a.jpg)

The obverse (a) depicts an iron wolf from the legend associated with the city's foundation: Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas dreamt of an iron wolf standing on a hillside. He took it as sign to build a city there, and the wolf became a symbol of Vilnius. On the reverse (b), the wolf is replaced by a pig devouring the Lithuanian flag. It is wearing a military hat and his collar is adorned with Polish military insignia. The dates and text emphasize the juxtaposition of the images: Vilnius 1323 – “This was Gediminas’ dream” (*Taip Gediminas sapnavo*)/ Vilnius 1920 – “This was not what Gediminas dreamt about” (*Taip Gediminas nesapnavo*). Thus, implying the historical ownership of the capital by Lithuanians, which was violated by the Poles.

By the mid 1920s the anti-Polish medals and posters became bolder and openly urged the liberation of Vilnius. Figure 9 shows a medal issued to commemorate the 600th anniversary of the founding of Vilnius in 1923, despite the city still being under Polish control. The medal defiantly declares Vilnius the capital of Lithuania (*Vilnius Lietuvos Sostinė*).



Figure 9 (a) A medal commemorating the foundation of Vilnius by P. Rimša, 1923 (http://www.albionmich.com/history/histor_notebook/images_S/Rimsa4a.jpg); (b) An anti-Polish poster, 1925 (<https://audiovis.nac.gov.pl/obraz/85021/>)

Figure 9 (b) uses Rimša's design from 1920, but it is now more strident: "Let's Liberate Vilnius!" (*Vaduokime Vilnių!*). The text at the bottom increases the poignancy of this slogan, as it calls for donations to a Lithuanian Fusiliers' Liberation Fund.

The Association for the Liberation of Vilnius was founded in 1925 and became the most powerful civic organisation in the country (Weeks, 2015). It issued Vilnius Passports to every schoolchild as "a symbol of belonging to the nation" (Davoliūtė, 2014: 188), although many Lithuanians had never been to Vilnius. An aspirational guidebook to the city with Lithuanian street names was published (Narbutas, 1939).

In modern LL studies the above examples are considered to be elements of a wider socio-semiotic landscape, allowing researchers to analyse it not only as an arena of conflict, but also as a mass communication tool of nationalising propaganda. It emphasises "the way written discourse interacts with other discursive modalities" (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010: 2), thus broadening our understanding of the LL towards symbolic practices. Although the city remained under Polish control until

1939, this symbolic appropriation of the city helped to keep the idea of Lithuanian Vilnius alive.

2.3 World War II (1940 - 1944)

The stability of the LL in the post-liminal Polish phase of the city turned out to be short-lived. As Czepczyński noted, the liminal transformation of cultural landscape “may consist of multiple separations, transitions and re-incorporations” (2016: 72). The cataclysms of World War II changed the “national face” of Vilnius again. As a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Red Army took over the city in September 1939 and it was transferred to Lithuania. The Lithuanian Army entered Vilnius displaying a victorious slogan “Vilnius inhabitants welcome Lithuanian army” (Fig. 10).



Figure 10 The Lithuanian Army enters Vilnius with a victorious slogan “Vilnius inhabitants welcome Lithuanian army” (*Vilniaus gyventojai sveikina Lietuvos kariuomenę*), 1939 (http://kam.lt/lt/naujienos_874)

However, “Lithuanian soldiers were astonished that they could not communicate with the local population, and officers were forced to resort to French and German to ask for directions” (Snyder, 2002: 47). The population of Polish Vilno did not speak the

Lithuanian language, but despite this, official Lithuanian propaganda spoke of liberating the city and “restoring” its Lithuanian identity. The first changes were street names from Polish to Lithuanian. Many of these were indicated in a guidebook published shortly before the return of the city and now the “imagined Vilnius” was translated from this book to the actual cityscape (Weeks, 2015: 153). The replacement of street signs was not fully implemented, as in a short period of time Vilnius went through three major regime changes: the “bourgeois” republic (1939 – 1940), the Lithuanian Soviet Republic 1940-1941), the Nazi occupation (1941-1945).⁵

As was illustrated in section 2.1 by the structuralist methodological principles, each new regime was concerned with the transformation of city space as a means of the establishment of its ideology and power, in which the “battle” of street signs is usually the first visible transformation of any regime change. The “bourgeois” Lithuanian Republic would not permit Polish street names, and the Soviet Lithuanian Republic would not allow “bourgeois” names. Soon after the establishment of the Soviet regime, plans were made to rename over 100 streets and squares. For example, names with religious connotations were to be changed and replaced in accordance with Marxist-Leninist ideology (e.g. Church St became Citizens St) (Weeks, 2015: 165). However, these plans with some exceptions remained on paper, as Germany invaded Vilnius in June 1941 and introduced more changes.

By tracing the history of the different names of the main street of Vilnius, we can visualise the city’s turbulent history and the changing fate of its inhabitants. The street, built in 1836, was initially known as St. George Avenue (Russian: *Георгиевский проспект*), then Mickiewicz Street (Polish: *ulica Mickiewicza*), and Hitler Street during the Nazi occupation. In 1940, at the beginning of the Soviet occupation, it was called Stalin Avenue, later renamed Lenin Avenue. Its present name, Gediminas Avenue (Lithuanian: *Gedimino Prospektas*) was used from 1939 to 1940 and again since 1989.

Of course, street naming is only one of the multitude of methods, used by state power for symbolic appropriation of the city. As Weeks states, the process of re-appropriation requires “political power and soft (propaganda, culture, education) and hard policies (repression, prohibition of languages, restriction of religion, and

⁵ See Davoliūtė (2013); Liekis (2010); Snyder (2002, 2003); Weeks (2015)

even the extremes of ethnic cleansing and genocide)” (Weeks, 2015: 3). Examples of these political practices can be seen in the changing face of Vilnius through the centuries. The size of this chapter does not allow us to discuss the large scale population displacement, mass deportations and elimination of various ethnic groups in Lithuania, but these processes are important in understanding the historical background of current tensions and conflicts⁶.

The first year of Soviet rule was accompanied by mass arrests of “anti-Soviet socially harmful” individuals, 19,000 were deported during the first month (Grunskis, 1996: 23). The deportations were not selected on the basis of ethnicity, as the deportees were roughly representative of the population as a whole (Balkelis 2005; Davoliūtė, 2013). These repressions were one of the reasons why many Lithuanians welcomed the Nazis. They hoped for the restoration of independence, but the Lithuanian government was not recognised, and the Nazis formed their own civil administration - the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, paying only lip service to Lithuanian cultural affairs. Newspapers were printed in German and Lithuanian (Weeks 2015). Poles had few rights, Jews none. In July 1941 a decree was issued that all Jews must wear a special patch on their backs and observe a curfew. The Vilnius Ghetto was established in the old quarter of the city. The photographs from this period leave no doubt about the real power landscape of Vilnius under the Nazis (Fig. 11).

⁶ See Balkelis (2005, 2010); Davoliūtė (2013); Snyder (2002); Weeks (2015)

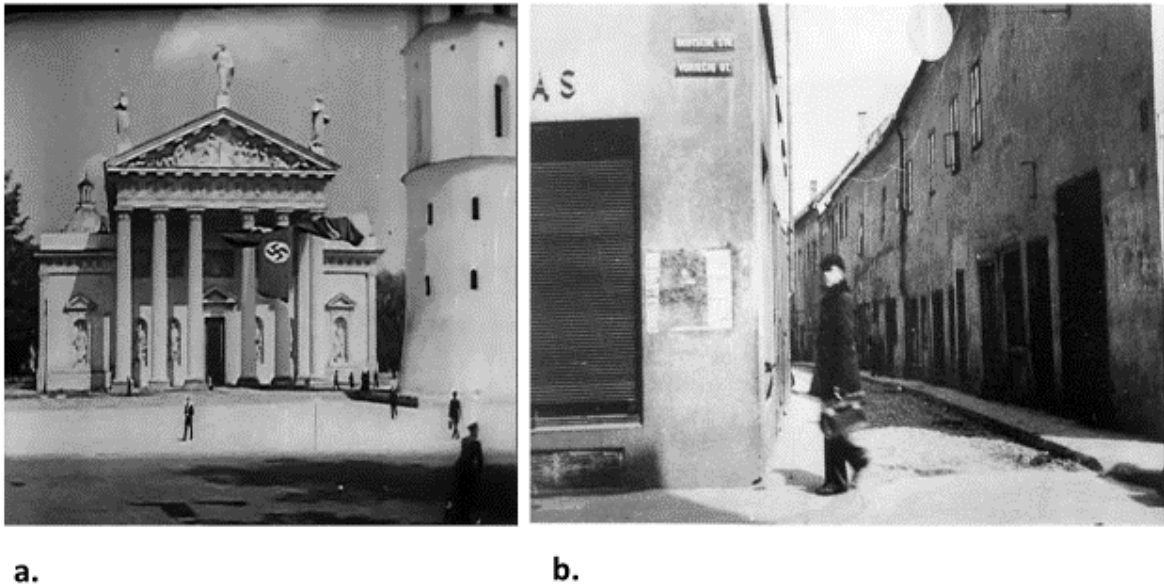


Figure 12 (a) A Nazi flag on the main Vilnius cathedral, 1941; (b) The German/Lithuanian street sign (*Deutschegasse/Vokiečių gatvė*), 1943
(http://www.archyvai.lt/lt/lya_parodos/vilniaus-getas.html)

By 1944 the city was fated to have yet another liminal rite of passage due to power change. As the Red Army progressed westwards, “Stalin decided that Vilnius was to be Lithuanian” (Snyder, 2003: 88). In 1945/6, 170,000 ethnic Poles were “repatriated” to Poland and the Lithuanian countryside during of the post-war population exchanges negotiated by the Allies’ (Davoliūtė, 2013). Vilnius became the capital of Soviet Lithuania.

2.4 Soviet Vilnius (1944 – 1991)

Although Lithuanian Vilnius has been the goal of Lithuanian nationalist movement since its inception in 1905, the Soviet period in Lithuania is often characterised by cultural Sovietization and linguistic Russification, which “once again presented the Lithuanian nation with a challenge to the survival of its identity” (Clarke, 2006: 165). This analysis reflects the fact that Sovietisation was imposed by force and provoked armed resistance, crushed by early Soviet political repressions and mass deportations between 1939-1947. “In popular and official Lithuanian memory today,

the Soviets were nothing less than agents of genocide” (Davoliūtė, 2014: 108). On the other hand, a number of researchers recently tried to establish a link between the development of Soviet Lithuanian identity, the nationalising drive of the inter-war republic and the early Lithuanian nationalist movement, which highlights the national character of Lithuanian Sovietisation (Davoliūtė, 2013, 2014, 2016; Snyder, 2003; Weeks, 2015). From this perspective, Soviet rule in Vilnius can be seen not only as a repressive regime, but also as a catalyst for transnational and transcultural processes which brought demographic and linguistic Lithuanisation. Snyder argues that Soviet policies opened political and physical space for the re-creation of Vilnius as a Lithuanian city. For the first time in modern history the Lithuanian language became a badge of status in Vilnius (2003).

The Soviet Lithuanian authorities initiated yet another process of landscape cleansing. The pre-liminal phase of this transformation is characterised by the removal of Polish identity of the city and replacing it with the Lithuanian one. Even though it had a very strong Soviet symbolic presence, our data from this period support the second view and reveal a picture of Soviet Vilnius, where “language was a mark of distinctiveness for Lithuanians under Soviet rule” (Snyder, 2003: 97). The photographs from the late 40s and early 50s contain predominantly Lithuanian signs. There is no evidence of the Polish face of the city seen in section 2.2. Instead, there are political signs typical of the era, such as propaganda boards in public institutions (libraries, schools, etc.), slogans from Soviet parades (Fig. 13), and signs on public buildings (Fig.14). It might be interesting to note, that during this separation phase the new power actors were more concerned with establishing and delivering the new Soviet ideology in the national language, rather than embarking on the Russification of Lithuania, therefore, ironically achieving the long standing dream of Lithuanian nationalist movement – to see Vilnius as the capital of Lithuania.



a.

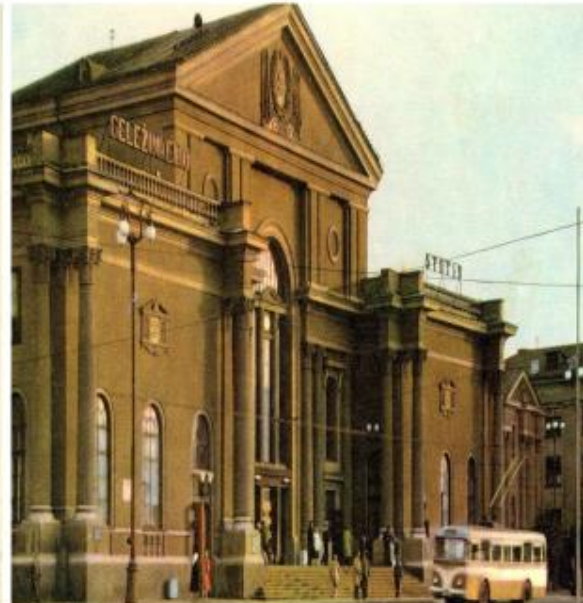


b.

Figure 13 (a) A Stalinist propaganda board in Lithuanian in a library's reading room, 1940s; (b) Pioneers' parade dedicated to the 10th anniversary of the Soviet Lithuanian Republic, 1950 (http://www.archyvai.lt/lt/lya_parodos/sovietine-lietuva-antano-jn3a/kultura.html)



a.



b.

Figure 14 (a) Arts Museum with Lithuanian sign (*Dailės Muziejus*), 1949 (www.archyvai.lt/lt/lyla_parodos/...jn3a/kultura.html); (b) Vilnius railway station with Lithuanian sign (*Geležinkelio Stotis*), 1960 (<https://visualhistory.livejournal.com/1259697.html>)

If we compare the socio-linguistic landscape of Vilnius in Imperial Russia with the landscape during Soviet times, we can see that the Russian Empire implied a strong degree of Russification. Russian was the language of the imperial bureaucracy and thus held precedence over other languages. Our photographs in section 2.1 strongly contrast with the photographs above in terms of language distribution and hierarchy. The prominence of Lithuanian at the main entry points to the city and the absence of Russian, suggests that the titular Lithuanian language replaced Russian (and Polish) and became the main instrument of Sovietisation imbuing Lithuanian nationalism with an aura of Soviet legitimacy. The pioneers parade (Fig. 14 (b)) is a typical example of the cultural-political events, which emphasised the socialist cultivation of youth as the ideal of a bright Soviet future. The slogan displayed below the LTSR coat of arms says "*Partija – mūsų pergalės įkvėpėjas ir organizatorius*" ("The (Communist) Party is the inspirer and organiser of our victory"). Thus, Lithuanian language was used to focus public discourse on the construction of a Lithuanian ethnic identity in Soviet context.

By the late 50s, Vilnius also had its share of Soviet monuments, but many Lithuanian writers, composers, and communists were also honoured. Many streets were renamed after communist leaders, and even more lost their historical Polish names assuming Lithuanian ones (Weeks, 2008).

By mid 1960s the LL of Vilnius reflected the transition to established Soviet rule. Although the socio-cultural landscape of Vilnius continued to be national in nature, the new official Soviet policy of bilingualism meant that documents such as birth and marriage certificates, contained Lithuanian and Russian. Street signs and most shop fronts were now bilingual, with the titular Lithuanian language displayed first (Fig. 15).



Figure 15 A street in Vilnius with bilingual Lithuanian-Russian shop signs “*Vinas - Вино*” (“Wine”) circled in red, 1966

<https://www.miestai.net/forumas/forum/bendrosios-diskusijos/miestai-ir-architekt%C5%ABra/miest%C5%B3-architekt%C5%ABros-raida/845-vln-vilnius-1945-1990-sovietme%C4%8Dio-nuotraukos>

Lithuanian was much more prevalent, and Soviet culture in its Lithuanian and Russian guises was unquestionably hegemonic (Weeks, 2015). Between 1960 and 1980, Vilnius grew rapidly and became steadily more Lithuanian. Lithuanian poetry and prose enjoyed notable successes, and Vilnius University became a haven for Baltic studies (Snyder, 2003; Davoliūtė, 2013). Although our data indicate the continuous “bilingualisation” of public spaces, they detect no increase in Russification. In fact, the patterns of language positioning and use remain similar to those of the 60s and 70s. In most top-down controlled locations the signs are bilingual, with Lithuanian first, and Russian second. There is also evidence of monolingual Lithuanian signs, which indicate that the policy was not strictly followed either in everyday or official life.

As we can see, the city was now very different from earlier periods analysed in this chapter. *Weeks* calls this period “socialist normalcy” (2015:189) in contrast to

the earlier historical cataclysms. Soviet and Lithuanian identities coexisted in the form of a bilingual cityscape in tandem with selected elements of national culture and history. The privileged position of the Lithuanian language “was evident at the university, in the academy of sciences, in the majority of research institutes, in the mass press” (Weeks, 2015: 191), and even in the local organs of the Communist Party. Our data contain a number of photographs depicting official meetings of the Lithuanian Communist Party. These confirm the wide spheres of influence of the Lithuanian language, from shop fronts to the congresses of the Communist Party (Fig.16). This situation of “bilingual cultural hegemony” (Weeks, 2015: 208) led to the virtual disappearance of the earlier Polish identity of the city. Our data contain very few images connected with Polish, mostly left on some religious and historical buildings as structural parts of their architectural design.

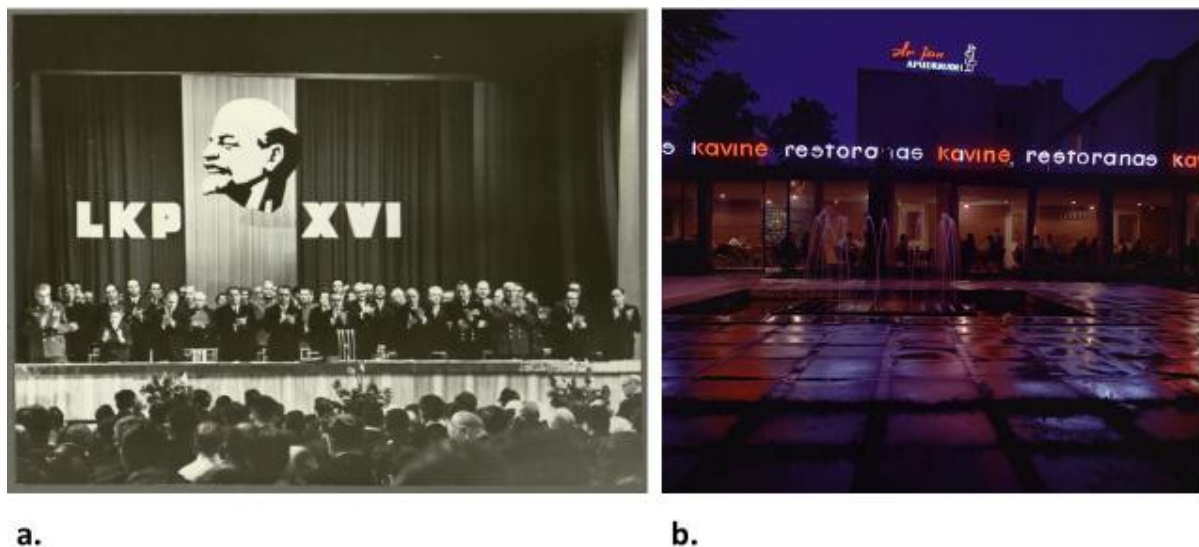


Figure 16 (a) 16th Congress of the Lithuanian Communist Party with a Lithuanian banner “*LKP*” (“LCP - Lithuanian communist Party”), 1971 (www.virtualios-parados.archyvai.lt); (b) Lithuanian café and restaurant signs, 1980’s (<https://www.miestai.net/forumas/...ir.../page8>)

Although “Soviet and Lithuanian identities coexisted uneasily in Vilnius” (Weeks, 2015: 191), it was a comparatively stable period in the city’s history. It stopped being

dislocated by different powers and ethnic groups, and “had become truly Lithuanian, despite its mixed population” (Weeks, 2015: 191). This could be considered as the longest post-liminal incorporation phase in the city’s history. Elements of national revival “albeit under the oppressive and limiting conditions of Soviet rule, fulfilled the long-held dream of Lithuanian nationalists” (Snyder, 2003: 91-93).

It appears that Sovietisation involved considerably more than the imposition of oppressive external rule. It shaped the development of national resistance and nation building, which allowed the local communists and intelligentsia to facilitate the creation of a Soviet identity with a Lithianian nuance. They gained an exceptional level of cultural autonomy and followed the intellectual traditions of the interwar period, which later resurfaced in the cultural movement against Soviet rule, *Sajūdis*, and eventually led to the Republic’s independence in 1991.

3 Post-Soviet Vilnius (1991 – present)

The collapse of the communist regimes in Central Europe in 1989 is one of the recent major political transformations, which was followed by major landscape revolutions. Lithuania was the first of the ex-Soviet republics to declare its independence and its Soviet socio-cultural landscape was the first to reflect the process of de-Russification and language shift from the national-Russian bilingualism to national monolingualism. It was the first in the East European block to face the problem of how to manage the inherited leftover Soviet landscape and the transformation of the political and national identity.

3.1 Language policy in Lithuania and the LL of Vilnius

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, a Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR was issued declaring Lithuanian the main means of official communication (Decree on Language, 1989). After the declaration of independence, the new Lithuanian Constitution (1992), determined Lithuanian as the state language (Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucija, 1992, art.14)., which then became the language of the public sphere (Republic of Lithuania Law on the State Language, 1995, IX-954: art.3-5).

As we illustrated earlier, every political transformation is followed by urban landscape re-arrangement, where languages and space representing opposing ideas “become enemies and rivals, as well as victims and winners” (Czepczyński, 2008: 109). In the aftermath of independence, Russian became the “victim”, as it was erased from all bilingual street signs. The de-Russification process was realised by various nationalising linguistic, cultural and semiotic resources. Pavlenko (2009) highlights five processes illustrating the change in the functions of languages in multilingual post-Soviet societies: language erasure, replacement, upgrading and downgrading, regulation and the appearance of transgressive signs. In Lithuania, the most prominent of these were erasure and downgrading. Figure 18 is an example of spontaneous bottom-up erasure by individuals, where the offending Cyrillic script was scratched from a bilingual Lithuanian-Russian street sign.



Figure 17 A bilingual street sign in Vilnius where Russian on the bottom line has been obliterated, 1

Such acts were a reaction to the new language policy by individuals too impatient to wait for its slower official top-down implementation. However, it was a temporary measure. By mid-1990s such signs had been removed and replaced with official top-down monolingual Lithuanian signs. Fig. 19 illustrates a street name, Pilies g. (Castle St.), which in Soviet days would have been bilingual and contained the name of the street in Russian below its Lithuanian equivalent.



Figure 18 Monolingual Lithuanian sign in the old town, 2016 (author's photo)

We discussed examples of scratching or painting over of parts of Russian signs in section 2.1, when language conflicts in Imperial Vilnius were at their height in 1915. Almost a century later, the historical tensions resurfaced as a language conflict on the street signs of independent Vilnius. The “battle” of street signs once again was the first indication of the new order – the pre-liminal cleansing phase (changing from Soviet to independent Lithuanian Vilnius). After the official re-establishment of independence many old streets lost their Soviet names and received their historical names. Figure 19 above illustrates one such example. In Soviet days this street was named after the Soviet writer Gorky, now it proudly bears its old historical name. New streets were named after the leaders and important events of the nationalist movement. For example, book carriers, mentioned in section 2.1, were honoured with street names, museums, and monuments.⁷

Following Van Ganep's model, Lithuanian post-communist landscape transformations can be paralleled with liminal passages. The first pre-liminal phase

⁷ A detailed account of street name changes could be found in a book by the Lithuanian city historian Antanas Čaplinskis (2000).

included most obvious cleansings and changes of the vivid communist iconic landscape features. Figure 19 illustrates a wider semiotic landscape cleansing which goes beyond the elimination of linguistic signs – the destruction of Soviet monuments. As part of the monumental politics it was concerned with the removal of unwanted references and elimination of “wrong” meanings contained in emblems, logos and coats of arms.



a.



b.

Figure 19 (a) Lenin's monument in central Vilnius in Soviet times (<https://aloban75.livejournal.com/3293225.html>); (b) Removal of Lenin's monument in 1991 (www.prisimenu.lt)

The removal of Lenin's statue in Vilnius was one of the first of many monumental sweeps. It had stood there since 1952. In August 1991 it was removed by crane to cheering crowds and became the most known worldwide symbol of the fall of Soviet Power, as the footage was shown on CNN and reported in the international media.

These generally ended by the late 1990s. Many of the unwanted codes and symbols, names and labels had been eliminated by physical destruction and demolishing of features hard to reinterpret, followed by elimination from social practices and memories. As Davolute said, the historical period “from 1940 to 1990

was declared legally inoperative, politically illegitimate, socially perverse, and culturally inauthentic” (2013 :4).

As was discussed earlier, transition is the most typical second liminal phase. A central part of the transition is based on the rejection of many aspects of the ‘recent past’. Almost all revolutions begin with the idea of ‘year zero’: a new beginning founded upon the eradication of what went before. However, this collective voluntary amnesia is an ultimately untenable position and is usually accompanied by the return either to conciliated versions of old pasts or to the creation of a new past in support of new identities and aspirations (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1999). In Lithuania this stage could be labelled as “the return of memory” and consists of two processes: 1. an interpretation of the capital city as symbol of national historical continuity; 2. re-construction of national identity.

In terms of the LL in post-Soviet Vilnius, the power narratives of continuity during this stage are supported through State patronage over cultural heritage. The Department of Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania registers and supervises all monuments of cultural heritage. Databases of cultural heritage are constantly updated. They include various types of cultural heritage units, including monuments, objects of urban heritage, places of historical events, etc.

When the Lithuanian parliament declared independence in March 1990, it did not proclaim a new republic, but quite deliberately reconstructed the interwar Lithuanian state and reinforced the Lithuanian national roots of the nation. The ancient origins of Lithuania in Vilnius are glorified, with references to key mythical sites, such as the Cathedral square and the tower of Gediminas. The Cathedral Square in the Old Town is a symbol of Lithuanian statehood: it is the sight of two new most important national identity icons – the statue to the city’s founder, who ruled from 1316 to 1341, Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas with the iron wolf (mentioned in 2.2), and the Royal Palace (the original building was destroyed by the Russian Empire in 1801). The statue of the Duke was erected in 1996, and the reconstruction of the Palace started in 2002 (Fig.20).



Figure 20 The Royal Palace and the statue of the Grand Duke Gediminas, 2017 (author's photo)

Such developments create new hierarchies and exclusions. If in 1920s Vilno the anti-Polish propaganda medals (2.2) were contesting the Polish cultural hegemony, in the 1990s Vilnius Gediminas' dream became a new reality. The past hegemonies were now excluded from the cityscape and "it became clear that Lithuania perceived itself as the homeland of ethnic Lithuanians" (Weeks, 2015: 211).

Public space is an important political arena for the enforcement of language policies and transformation of practices, as official public signs, such as street and place names, reflect spatial power relations and are sanctioned by local authorities. However, any city is also a composite of its inhabitants and their actions, which function as interfaces between official frameworks and individual experiences. Following Goffman's subjectivist perspective (1963), which is useful in analysing the subjective dimensions of social experiences, we will attempt to illustrate that individual experiences of Vilnius inhabitants do not always coincide with the official power and ethnic narrative. From Goffman's point of view, identity markers should be clearly visible in any LL.

Despite the strict policy of Lithuanian monolingualism and the fact that the cityscape now reflects its new status as the capital of a Lithuanian nation-state, Russian and Polish can still be heard and seen on Vilnius' streets, as ethnically non-Lithuanian citizens of the country make up a large proportion of the city. Figure 21 illustrates transgressive signs, which “violate or subvert official norms in the choice of either script or language” (Pavlenko, 2009: 264). Although the Law on the State Language in Lithuania decrees that all signs in public spaces “shall be in the state language” (1995, Art.17), figure 21 shows trilingual signs placed by private individuals, (a) in a café lavatory in central Vilnius frequented by foreign tourists and (b) on the door of a Roman Catholic cathedral (driven by its Lithuanian and Polish private users with a nod towards visiting tourists). They use English, Russian and Polish, not sanctioned officially, but their placement on the signs still indicates the underprivileged socio-political positioning of Russian and Polish. If we compare the current visual hierarchy of languages with previous historical periods, this is an example of language downgrading. The appearance of English is also an interesting detail, evidencing the role of English as a global language. Visibility of such bottom-up signs in Vilnius is very low, usually inside commercial and cultural premises.



Figure 21 (a) A trilingual Lithuanian-English-Russian sign; (b) A trilingual Lithuanian-English-Polish sign, 2016 (author's photographs)

The disappearance of bilingual Lithuanian-Russian signs, together with the Russian language downgrading, the monuments sweep, and Lithuanian symbolic appropriation of the city are understandable core elements of nationalising processes, state building, and identity renegotiation. However, Lithuania is a multiethnic country, and Vilnius its most ethnically diverse city. The next section will analyse how the rights of ethnic minorities are observed and whether their legal provision and everyday practices contradict one another.

3.2 Ethnic policy in Lithuania and the LL of Vilnius

Despite strict titular language regulations, Lithuania is usually seen by scholar as a pioneer of liberal politics regarding the integration of minorities into the new political system (Andrlík, 2009; Hogan-Brun & Ramonienė, 2005; Pavlenko, 2009; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). During the late 1980s it was the first of the Baltic States to adopt an inclusive national policy. Its Law on Ethnic Minorities (1989) became the first in the whole of the former Eastern Bloc. The explicit promise to protect minorities is also part of two articles of the Constitution, which oblige the country to guarantee their rights to use their language independently and to maintain their culture (Lietuvos Respublikos Konstitucija, 1992, art.37&45). Lithuania also chose the so called zero option, granting citizenship to all people residing in its territory at independence.

These legal frameworks are the basis for claims that the transition to the titular language was relatively smooth, that Lithuania had few difficulties with its national minorities and managed to avoid major conflicts and tensions (Andrlík, 2009; Hogan-Brun, G. & Ramonienė, 2005; Kolstø, 1993; Pavlenko, 2013). The picture that emerges is of relative peace and harmony. However, focus on the analysis of legislative frameworks excludes public space, presence and visibility of

non-majority groups. It also takes no account of mutually contradictory regulations in Lithuanian legislation, which were criticised by the Council of Europe.⁸

To have a fuller picture, we argue that public space, not legislation, is the arena where language conflicts and ethnic tensions manifest themselves. It highlights the physical presence of minority identities and differences. If the state does not allow expression of these differences in public space, it cannot claim that these groups have equal rights to be part of the state's identity.

This point is particularly relevant, as the territorial distribution of ethnic minorities is uneven. Although overall Poles comprise 6.6% and Russians 5.9% of the population, there exist multi-ethnic areas in the east and south-east of the country, where Lithuanians are in a minority. For example, in Vilnius Region over half the population is Polish (Oficialiosios Statistikos Portalas, 2011). The Law on Ethnic Minorities stipulated that minorities have the right to maintain bilingual signs in the areas with "substantial numbers of a minority with a different language" (Andrlík, 2009; Vasilevich, 2013), but the termination of the validity of the Law in 2010 resulted in a situation, where "the legal provisions that allowed the usage of minority languages in the public sphere in Lithuania ceased to exist" (Vasilevich, 2013: 11).

The right to have bilingual street signs in the predominantly Polish areas is one of the "Polish issues", in Lithuanian public discourse. Most of the bilingual Polish-Lithuanian signs were placed during the period, when such rights were provided under the Law on National Minorities. However, since the cessation of its validity in 2010 and despite the ratification of the FCNM, Lithuanian authorities see these signs as illegal and demand their removal.⁹ The battle of the street signs lasted over four years, until the Vilnius Regional Court judgement of 2013 decided to fine the Administrative Director of Lithuania's Šalčininkai District Municipality (which is mostly Polish) 100 LTL (30 EUR) for each day's delay in the execution of the

⁸ For example, the Law on State Language orders all state institutions and local self-government to provide services in the state language (1995, Art.7), but the Law on Ethnic Minorities allows use of the language of minorities by local authorities in the regions, where these minorities represent a significant part of the population (1989, Art.5).

⁹ Article 11 of the FCNM (Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities) states that when the area is inhabited by a substantial number of persons belonging to a national minority, the usage of traditional local names, street names and other topographical indications in the language of the national minority should be enabled. Lithuania signed the FCNM in 1995 and ratified it in March 2000 without reservations. Thus, all provisions of this document extend to all ethnic groups residing within the territory of the country (Vasilevich, 2013).

removal order. In January 2014 he was asked to pay over 43, 000 LTL (12, 500 EUR) (EFHR, 2014). The signs were finally removed in October 2014 (Figure 22) (Tarasiewicz, 2014).



Figure 22 Lithuanian-Polish street sign in 2013 (insert on the right) and the empty space in 2014 (<http://kurierwilenski.lt/2014/10/14/tylko-tam-jest-ulica-gdzie-jest-litewska-tablica/>)

This landscape cleansing 20 years after the initial landscape sweep of the pre-liminal phase discussed in section 3.1, indicates that there is a fourth rite of passage, which turns the liminal transformation back again to the initial stage and contradicts the van Gennep's three-stage transformation process. "What seemed to be a linear process, now looks like a circular or liminal spiral" (Czepczyński, 2016: 73), returning again and again to earlier historical and ethnic conflicts.

Language battles can take unexpected forms. For example, conflict and exclusion in terms of symbolic construction could manifest themselves in landscapes, which are characterised "as representation of spaces that privilege subjects positions and points of view" (Leeman & Modan, 2009 : 337). In this case the focus is not language itself, but on the actions connected with it. Figure 23 illustrates an interesting case where not a language itself but the action of rebranding sausages and partially erasing a Russian abbreviation referring to Soviet Lithuania

on manhole covers (after more than 20 years of independence) creates a discursive practice that can shift or reaffirm the relationship of power (Jones, 2010).



Figure 23 (a) “Tarybinis” (Soviet) sausages, 2013; (b) manhole covers near the parliament building, one with the abbreviated SSR (CCP) 2013, one with the same abbreviation erased 2016, both circled in red (author’s photos).

Figure 23 (a) depicts the brand name “Tarybinis” (Soviet) which was created in 1988 and existed happily until 2013 and constituted about one-fifth of the meat product market in Lithuania. Its “Soviet” sausages were among the most popular and yielded good profits for the Samsonas company. However, in the wake of the worsening relationship between Russia and Ukraine in January 2013 and the growing support in Lithuania for the Ukrainian independence movement, the company decided to scrap the name of the brand. Some observers consider that there must definitely be a connection between the rebranding and the visit at the time of the Ukrainian Culture minister in Lithuania. The company’s president explained that the decision was prompted by the political situation. He said: “Current geopolitical situation obliges us as dutiful citizens to reject the word “Soviet” (Волкова, 2013).

Figure 23 (b) illustrates a partial deletion of the abbreviation in Russian - LSSR deleting SSR and leaving Lit (for Lithuanian) on manhole covers in front of the

Seimas building in May 2013. In both cases the word Soviet remained in public spaces in the Lithuanian and Russian languages as a part of the final incorporation phase. However, cultural landscapes always represent social, economic, political and cultural trends that can lead to a re-evaluation of landscape elements. Therefore, liminal transition which usually is ended by the final incorporation, can be sometimes reversed to the earlier phases of transformations and bring to the surface historical and ethnic tensions. These examples raise an interesting question of how actors in a given landscape might attempt to shape the landscape itself.

The fight for symbolic presence of Polish in public space also includes claims for the original spelling of Polish names and surnames in identity documents¹⁰ and the struggle against amendments to the Law on Education¹¹. These issues became a subject of international concern. They were recognised as problematic in legal and practical terms by the Advisory Committee on the FCNM, which urged the Lithuanian government “to address the legal vacuum created by the lapse of the Law on Ethnic Minorities” (Vasilevich, 2013: 3). The promise to resolve the question of the original spelling of names and dual language street signs still remains a promise, although in September 2017 the Lithuanian Prime Minister hinted that the time is ripe to solve this issue. The two other issues also remain unresolved.

This “legal vacuum” and the top-down policies of linguistic exclusion intensified Polish struggle for visibility, which does not seek to enhance communication¹², but to highlight physical presence of a minority identity in public space. As a response to the authorities’ reluctance to accept and implement the issues discussed above, the Union of Lithuanian Poles and The Polish Parents’

¹⁰Since 1998 Lithuanian citizens of Polish origin have been asking for the right to spell their names using Polish orthography. This problem boils down to the differences between Polish and Lithuanian alphabets. Although both use Latin script, some Polish letters are absent from the Lithuanian alphabet and vice versa. The practice of personal names spelling in Lithuania is based on the Lithuanian Constitutional Court’s Ruling “On the compliance of the 31 January 1991 Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania Resolution “On Writing of Names and Family Names in Passports of Citizens of the Republic of Lithuania”, which states that all names shall be written in Lithuanian letters (1999).

¹¹Amendments to the Law on Education adopted by the Parliament in 2011, stipulate that the geography, history and civic education (citizenship) are to be taught in the Lithuanian language in national minority schools. Previously, only the Lithuanian Language was taught in Lithuanian. This Law also makes a provision for the same assignments of the Lithuanian Language Examination to be given to school-leavers of both Lithuanian and national minority schools starting from 2013 (without changing the existing curriculum first) and the abolition of the compulsory examination in minority languages (Kuzborska, 2013).

¹²Most Lithuanian Poles are trilingual (Polish/Lithuanian/Russian)

Forum staged a number of public protests. The central aim of any demonstration is “to influence public opinion, give public presence to specific political positions and change (or form) public understanding, policy and law” (Hanauer, 2015: 208). This is usually achieved by means of handheld signs, banners, slogans, and flags, carried by protesters. These make the contested issues visible in the “sanitized” linguistic landscape of the majority (Leeman, Modan, 2010: 187).

Figure 24 illustrates how the Polish minority, excluded from the public sphere, alters the landscape through protest and creates visibility.



Figure 24 (a) Handheld Polish signs, banners, and EU and Polish flags, 2012 (<http://bnn-news.com/minority-protest-school-reorganisation-held-vilnius-129759>); (b) Lithuanian, Russian, and Polish signs, 2016 (<https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/03/24/vilnius-and-warsaw-are-sacrificing-lithuania-poles.html>)

Such temporary signs become a form of political activism and help to overcome exclusion. The linguistic landscape becomes an essential tool in re-establishing visibility and re-appropriating space. Figure 245 (a) is an example of a transgressive Polish linguistic presence in central Vilnius. The sign “*Only morons try to liquidate Polish schools*” brings to the surface the exasperation felt by the Polish community at

the lack of co-operation with Lithuanian authorities. The Polish and the EU flags are a visual reminder of this lack at local and international level.

The transient LL of mass protests also acts as a “mechanism to reach audiences of many different cultures and backgrounds” and unify different individual and group identities (Rubdy & Said, 2015: 1). For different geopolitical and social reasons, the Russian minority does not claim its representation via visibility of the language in public space, however, it supported the Polish minority during demonstrations against education reforms. Figure 25 (b) shows how an image of solidarity emerges between Poles and Russians in the contestation of the mutual issue. The slogan in Lithuanian at the forefront places the demonstration in the nation-state context and may be interpreted as willingness to engage in a dialogue with authorities at all social levels. As one of the representatives of the Parents’ Forum at Polish Schools said, “we just don’t see any other way to draw the authorities’ attention to the problems...” and with a series of similar actions planned for the future “we will fight until we succeed” (Gulevich, 2016). Therefore, in modern times the public space also acts as “buffer between the state and private life” (Ben-Rafael, 2009: 40), which allows a temporary power shift and creates a contestation and negotiation environment for the “excluded” groups.

4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to illustrate how written languages and physical features of the cityscape emphasize the importance of LL in a socio-historical context and lead to understanding that language is key to expressing, managing and resolving conflicts of identity and language rights of national minorities. Our analysis incorporated an historical diachronic dimension to observe the changing national face of Vilnius through discourses of different powers via symbolic appropriation of the city in the 19th and 20th centuries. “The Russian, Polish, Soviet, and Lithuanian states all conceived and implemented a very specific type of national-symbolic politics” (Weeks, 2015: 3).

We also looked at how these historical conflicts, strengthened by modern social-political processes, impact on present-day relations between the Lithuanian state and its minorities and reflect the status of different ethnic groups via exclusion

of their languages from public sphere. At the same time, we analysed modern transient landscapes of demonstrations as a public sphere, where temporary re-appropriation of space by minorities can lead to discussions and potential conflict resolutions.

From the above, we can conclude, that LL is not only an arena of conflict representation, but also a tool, which aids the struggle of ethnic minorities against dominant language policies and practices. Thus, LL does not only “privilege powerful or majority languages over minority ones”, but also acts as a “representation of spaces that privilege subject positions and points of view” (Leeman & Modan, 2010: 337).

LL as a polyhedral tool of analysis in post-Soviet space: synchronic-diagnostic analysis is combined with historical diachronic analysis to establish the surface picture and the extra-linguistic semiotic analysis is used to investigate deeper implications of language policies and power relations.

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